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Interracial Council
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HISTORICAL SUMMARY

THE INTERRACIAL MOVEMENT IN NEWARK

Although there is no evidence that a studied effort has ever been made to trace the history of racial and intercultural relationships from the early days of Newark, there are traces to be found in historical material linking Newark to the old abolitionist movement and the pre-Civil War Underground Railroad. Influenced as it was, by the southern slave-holding philosophy, and being among the last of the northern states to emancipate its own slaves, New Jersey elected to align itself with the cause of the Union due to the activities of the progressive elements in the northern counties and the Quakers of South Jersey.

From that period, until the years of 1916-1922 which were characterized by vast intersectional migration, little is recorded as to the state of race and intercultural relationships. Reminiscences of oldtimers of the Irish and Italian strains have filled ⁱⁿ relationships and some of the gaps in recorded history, indicating that intergroup relationships were not always serene, and highlighting the oft-for-gotten fact that pigmentation has not been the primary cause of group prejudice and conflict.

The demands placed upon North Jersey industries by the insatiable appetite of War, and the closing of all ports of entry to European immigrants in 1914 and there after,

unleashed the straining tide of southern workers seeking the wages, schools and comparative freedom of the Northern industrial centers. With little thought and no coordinated plan, industry imported thousands of workers from southern fields, dumping them unceremoniously upon unprepared cities whose facilities for accommodating the newcomers were pitifully meager.

For every Negro worker so imported, white southerners also entered these communities in ratios variously estimated as being from six to ten whites for every Negro immigrant. Both elements brought with them their traditional prejudices and fears which found expression in communities not protected by the old, established mores of the areas from which they were carried. Instead, the prejudices were fanned by the ruthlessness of the competition for jobs, homes, and privileges which planless communities precipitated by their apathy and indifference.

Thus, the Newark of 1916 found itself wallowing in a morass of racial agitation, unrest and impending conflicts which were being met by indifference on the part of the majority, and by frantic unorganized efforts of social service agencies and progressive elements in the community.

It was these latter forces, recognizing the grave need for coordination and planned action, that initiated the work of the Negro Welfare League in 1917 to be named the New Jersey Urban League in the following year. Interracial cooperation in meeting the many problems arising out of racial antipathies and injustice, thus achieved organization, techniques and direction, and the League became the busy core of increasing activity through which aid, comfort and assurance were provided a disadvantaged minority by enlightened members of both racial groups.

THE NEWARK INTERRACIAL COUNCIL

But the League, classed as a professional, social service organization, provided little opportunity for the participation of many persons who felt that they had contribution to make in the realm of better race relations. Interracial committees, organized on a high cultural plane and designed to stimulate mutual appreciation between thoughtful people of both groups, were coming into being in all sections of the Nation. Newark, too, joined the ranks of progressive communities.

In 1929, representatives of twenty civic, educational and religious groups met to form the Newark Interracial Council. Passing through the painful, getting-acquainted stage of stiffness, politeness and formality, the members of the group gradually evolved from "discussion and tea"

period of existence, to one of a program of action.

Doffing its mantle of reticence and exclusiveness, the Council adopted the plan of holding public meetings in the downtown churches and institutions whose doors were open to them. As new recruits responded to their efforts, new challenges were accepted, and the Council's influences were felt in wider and wider circles. Ready at all times to lend these influences to others, in support of the Democratic principle, the Council gave invaluable assistance to the cause of better housing facilities for Negro citizens; to unrestricted use of teacher training facilities of the state by members of this group; and to the attainment of more equitable vocational training for colored youth. The appointment of the Council's first president, Mrs. Minnie Riker, to the Newark Board of Education by the then Mayor, Mayor C. Ellenstein, was belated recognition by the city officials of the cause for which the Council had fought so effectively, Democracy in the school system of the city. This appointment served as the forerunner of Mayor Murphy's subsequent appointment of the first Negro member of the Board of Education.

Three specific projects have served best to indicate the great stature and fighting spirit of the Interracial Council. The first of these was the ^{etc}celebrated and widely-heralded fight against discriminatory practices in

Newark City Hospital. For nearly a decade, this controversy has raged, yet withal, the Council has never resorted to unethical tactics or to partisan political maneuvering to attain its end. After years of interviewing and conferencing with Medical Boards and City Commissioners; after the release of reams of newspaper copy; after countless hours of organization meetings and mass meetings, public opinion was so influenced and action groups so inspired that the first dent was made in the determined opposition, by the recent appointments of Dr. E. Mae McCarroll and Dr. Clarence Jannifer to the staff of Newark City Hospital. A recounting of this effort, however, brief, would be incomplete without mention of Mrs. William Milwitzsky, who as chairman of the Hospital Committee, provided inspired leadership during the entire period of this controversy, and who was sponsor of the idea of merging the organizations now comprising the Council on Human Relations.

The second project related to the obnoxious policy of the American Red Cross in segregating blood plasma. Realizing that the exigencies of War demanded full cooperation with Red Cross appeals, yet resenting deeply the insulting policy this agency accepted from the Army and Navy, the Interracial Council conceived and promoted a program which has been widely copied in communities of the Nation.

Volunteers from the Council manned Red Cross solicitation booths and made house-to-house canvass, seeking financial contributions and blood donors. With each person contacted, however, was left a printed petition protesting against the policy of blood segregation and listing fifteen responsible organizations who concurred in the voicing of such protests. Literally thousands of these signed petitions flooded the offices of the Red Cross in each fund campaign, in one of the most intelligent, consistent and effective protest campaigns ever inaugurated.

When the Daughters of the Revolution gave the Nation a second exhibition of stupid reaction, in denying Hazel Scott use of the Capitol's only adequate auditorium, among the many voices of influence raised against them was that of Congresswoman Claire Booth Luce. Mrs. Luce announced her intention of resigning from the DAR in protest against their undemocratic practices. The Council took hasty action, urging Mrs. Luce to retain her membership and fight this bigotry from within, and was heartened to receive a response from Mrs. Luce specifically stating that her decision was being made to conform to the sage advice of the Council. A subsequent communication from Mrs. Luce informed the Council that her influences in her home chapter had resulted in organized action of the chapter against national policies.

THE INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION COUNCIL

Urban League workers in the field were meeting numerous problems and receiving many complaints which seemed to indicate an unhealthy and unguided state of race relations in Newark public schools. The impression was gaining widespread belief that schools in Negro neighborhoods were being considered "teachers' Siberia" and student morals and discipline were extremely low. The organization's Education Committee in November, 1942, invited into conference for a discussion of these problems several representatives of the Board and faculty of the Newark system, out of which discussion grew the idea of a body of representative citizens primarily interested in educational Democracy.

The formation of such a group was followed by a series of thoughtful conferences with representatives of two Intercultural Education organizations in New York. The first concrete result of this planning was the inauguration of a course on Intercultural Education in Newark ^{State} Teacher's College which attracted twenty-four enrollees in its first term, but a much smaller number in the second.

Meantime the group addressed its attention to the formulation of a series of proposals for reappraisal and re-direction of text material, teaching methods and teacher attitudes, all of which would bear directly upon the problems

observed. With the adoption of such proposals by the Council, a series of conferences with the Superintendent of schools and individual members of his Board of Education followed, and the general program outline was presented to the official Board in July, 1943.

Early in 1944, Superintendent Herron put into action one of the proposals which also emanated jointly from the Conference of Christians and Jews and the N.J. Goodwill Commission. This was the setting up of Teachers' Institutes in three sessions, attendance being made mandatory. Two were for elementary teachers and one for those in secondary work. Following addresses by Dr. Otto Klineburg, social anthropologist and other equally eminent authorities, the assembly in each instance was divided into discussion groups which utilized the leadership of Council members.

These institutes were followed by the appointment by the superintendent, of a faculty committee chosen from several local schools, whose function was to examine study materials, practices and methods and to submit proposals to lead ultimately to complete educational democracy. Several members of the faculty committee were also active members of the Intercultural Education Council, insuring the utilization of the thought and planning which had accompanied the efforts of the citizens' group.

The effect being wielded by certain types of childrens' literature was presented to the Council by the Urban League secretary, and Newark Public Library was urged to examine all such material for racially derogatory passages. Complete cooperation was extended by library personnel and it was found that no fewer than twenty-five of the most popular childrens' books contained numerous passages and/or illustrations likely to leave indelible marks of racial bias upon the unformed minds and emotions of young children. At the request of the League and the Council, these books were withdrawn from Public Library shelves, and the list was also made available to the Newark school libraries for similar treatment.

As this merger is being effected, the Council is pursuing plans for the formulation of proposals to Teachers' Colleges of the state, through which proper emphasis might be placed upon the whole problem of human relationships in the training of potential public school teachers.

CITIZENS' COMMITTEE ON RACIAL UNITY

The summer of 1943 will be remembered as one in which several racial clashes occurred in various parts of the Nation. A small-scale riot in Newark was sufficiently serious as to cause the violent death of one Negro youth and the injury of several Negro and Italian boys. While

prompt and drastic action of city officials, labor unionists and public spirited citizens served to isolate the area of conflict, the need for intensive, preventive programming was emphasized as underlying causes of racial tensions were brought to light. If Newark's small scale riot were not to grow to more dangerous proportions, intensive work must be done in the community.

Spurred by this thought, the secretaries of the Court Street Y.M.C.A. and the Urban League issued a joint invitation to a selected group of citizens representing a cross-section of racial and religious groups and avoiding the membership, as far as expedient, of existing interracial organizations. A very heartening response to the invitation resulted in the immediate organization of the Citizen's Committee on Racial Unity, and the creation of sub-committees on Press and Public Relations, the Church and Synagogue, City Administration, Youth, and on Labor and Management.

Each Committee entered upon its task with vigor. The Press Committee conferred with the daily, ^{foreign} language and Negro press on the need for controlling inflammatory news stories and racial slanting of news, with excellent results; the Committee on religious bodies circularized religious leaders, urging concerted action in promoting calmness and justice in intergroup relations. The youth Committee activities were geared into the Newark Youth Council and recreation department. The Committee on Labor and Management, working

through union locals and plant officials, impressed both with the serious need for vigilance, fair-dealing and forthright action in quelling any incipient conflict or disorder; and the Committee on City Administration promoted several conferences with Public Safety officials to interpret the part played by Police attitudes and technique in inciting or preventing racial clashes.

The work of the Press Committee first exposed the subtle censorship which then prevailed, wherein favorable news releases and newsreel shots of Negro troops were cut from all Army-Navy releases, unless specifically requested by individual newspapers. Local journals were induced to request such releases, giving Newark its first glimpse of the Negro as an active part of the War effort. This information in turn was relayed to National organizations whose crusade ultimately destroyed the censorship policy which had been conducted so quietly and so skillfully.

Although no admission nor commitment was ever given by the Department of Public Safety in relation to Police policy, ~~which~~ it was readily noticeable that unwarranted beating of Negroes by Police disappeared almost completely, and a new air of civility to all groups became apparent.

CONCLUSION

Each of the three organizations, discussed in this review, came into being in direct response to a community need. As three separate and distinct organizations, they have performed the functions for which they were organized, but more than that, have served to attract to the Army of Decency, many citizens who found in one or the other body a channel for their individual interests. There has been some degree of overlapping in membership, but such overlapping has served a positive function of achieving coordination while expanding total potential membership and distribution of work. The formation in the Fall of 1944 of the Council for Intergroup Action has placed responsibility for coordination in an official organization so that many other organizations, not specifically interracial in character but concerned with the broader field of Human Relationships, are now working shoulder to shoulder in the interest of a greater, more Democratic Newark.

Much credit is due and high tribute should be paid to the many courageous high-principled citizens who braved the sneers and scorn of their fellowmen to pioneer in a realm of community relations which but a few, brief years ago was considered an unpopular cause. Workers in race relations today are not derided as "windmill tilters", because the foresight, courage and consistency of these pioneers have dignified

the essential need for recognition of the basic democratic tenets of our form of government and of our accepted religious doctrines. In the accomplishments of these organizations, we find concrete evidence of the poignancy of the Psalmist's observation:

"Behold how good and how pleasant
it is for brethren to dwell together
in peace and in Unity."

On January 25, 1946, the three organizations whose history has been outline above, merged to form one organization. It is expected that the newly formed Citizens' Committee on Human Relations will carry on the work of the Interracial Council, Citizens' Committee on Racial Unity, and Intercultural Education Council.

The Stated purpose of the Citizens' Committee on Human Relations is--

To promote mutual understanding among, and equal opportunity for, all groups and individuals, regardless of race, creed, color, religion or national origin, and to the furtherance of Democratic policies and practices.

Its newly elected officers are taken from the membership of all three of the merging organizations. They are--

Executive Secretary - Mr. Maurice Feld

Vice Presidents - The Very Reverend Arthur C. Lichtenberger

Mrs. J. Otto Hill

Dr. Jay Rumney

Recording Secretary - Mrs. L. Hamilton Garner

Treasurer - Mr. Samuel S. Stewart, 110 Barclay St.,
Newark 3, New Jersey

Corresponding Secretaries -

Mrs. Ethel Williams - 52 Jones St., Newark 3, N.J.

Mrs. R. P. Milburn, Assistant.

Written late in 1945 or February 1946. "Possibly put
together by a joint effort of :

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Selma Milwitzky 3rd V. Pres. Interracial Council
(Mrs. William Milwitzky)

Geneva Garner Recording Secretary Citizens' Committee
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Presented to the library by Lucy Milburn Sept. 1966